

The World Heritage Convention

Looking Ahead

Richard J. Cook

The year 1992 marked the 20th anniversary of the adoption of the World Heritage Convention. After more than 20 years, the Convention has remained a remarkable visionary instrument, with the potential to achieve dramatic successes in global conservation causes. It has given formal voice to the concept of a commonly shared universal heritage of natural and cultural sites, a collective responsibility of member nations for their preservation, and a system whereby international cooperation and assistance in this task can be maintained. A committee of 21-member nations is established as the executive agent and a permanent Secretariat is now provided through UNESCO, Paris.

At the request of the World Heritage Committee, the occasion of the 20th anniversary was dedicated to a series of efforts to review and evaluate the Convention's performance, to identify its weaknesses, and to recommend specific actions that would lead to improvements in its performance.

These efforts were given focus by an evaluation of the Convention (performed under contract) and by an independent position paper on recommended changes (produced by the United States and Canada). Both efforts during 1992 led to a growing consensus on areas of prior weak performance and ways of seeking improvements. Two special experts' meetings were held in 1992 as part of this process: the first hosted by the United States and held in Washington in June, the second held at UNESCO Paris in October. These meetings brought together broad geographical regions, with expertise spanning the Convention from its inception to present. The meetings produced agreement on a set of "Strategic Orientations" for the Convention's future. They consisted of goals and objectives for the future; 50 specific recommendations to improve the Convention; draft revisions of the "Operational Guidelines" which would implement many of the 50 recommendations; and, a matrix chart showing responsibilities of various parties for implementing the recommendations. All these documents provide a basis for confidently charting the future of this important international treaty.

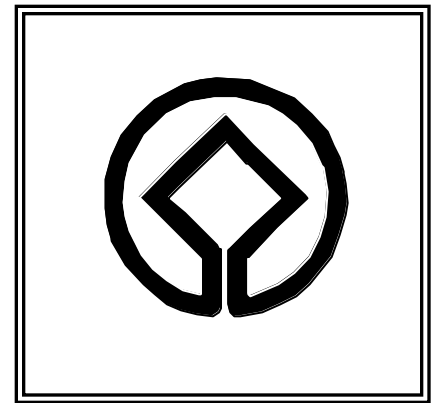
The "Strategic Orientations" were presented to the World Heritage Committee for action at its 16th Session hosted by the United States in December 1992, in Santa Fe, NM. They were examined in detail and overwhelmingly adopted by the Committee. Among the goals established for the future work of the Convention are the following:

1. *Promote completion of the identification of the world heritage: the committee will complete pending global and regional thematic studies on comparative significance within categories of sites;*

2. *Ensure the continued representativeness and credibility of the World Heritage List: the List is overwhelmingly Eurocentric; the Committee will maintain strict and consistent review procedures, refine and update criteria for evaluation of nominations, strive to balance the List with all geo-cultural regions, and review sites whose continued listing may no longer be justified;*
3. *Promote the adequate protection and management of the World Heritage Sites: the Committee will precisely identify site characteristics which justify original designation on the List, require assurances and evidence of national commitments to site protection within available means, and act quickly and decisively to address reported threats to World Heritage Sites;*
4. *Pursue more systematic monitoring of World Heritage Sites: the Committee will adopt regular monitoring methodologies and link monitoring reports with specific Committee actions to address threatened sites;*
5. *Increase public awareness, involvement and support: the Committee will give increased financial assistance to training and other projects that emphasize site interpretation; by increasing its image of efficient operations and decisive influence in site protection, greater donations and public support should result.*

The United States was particularly supportive of the last goal, and believes that greater public involvement and understanding of the Convention will be the single most influential factor in deciding its future success. The United States also realizes that its own efforts to promote awareness of the Convention have been inadequate. In response, a special meeting of the managers of all US World Heritage Sites was held in Santa Fe in 1992, in conjunction with the World Heritage Committee's session. The managers produced a draft National Park Service strategy plan to better implement World Heritage designation at the site level. The draft NPS strategy includes:

- revisions of Service policy guidelines to integrate World Heritage designation into sections affecting site planning, resource management decisions, interpretation and visitor use, and special park uses;
- full incorporation of the World Heritage Convention into general and specific in-Service training, and inclusion of World Heritage Site managers in international missions that involve World Heritage Sites in other countries; and,
- revisions of Interpretive Planning Guidelines, development of specific interpretive materials on the World



World Heritage Convention logo courtesy the World Heritage Centre, UNESCO. A reduction of this logo accompanies each World Heritage property illustrated in this issue of CRM.

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side the 50 states. Employees of SCRUI have assisted their colleagues in Guam, Micronesia, and Mexico to assess the richness of their underwater cultural resources. In the summer of 1993, they participated in dives on the sunken Confederate warship, the CSS *Alabama*, in the English Channel near Cherbourg with French divers. The division's chief, Dan Lenihan, is currently planning a trip to Honduras to assist the Honduran Institute of Anthropology and History design a program to assess the extent and condition of the country's submerged cultural resources. Dr. Joe Sanchez, the Chief of the Spanish Colonial Research Center, has traveled to Spain and Puerto Rico to search in foreign archives for relevant Spanish-language information on areas that are now under the jurisdiction of the NPS.

SWR employees have also assumed leadership roles in international conservation efforts. Dan Lenihan and Mike Taylor, of the Division of Conservation, serve on ICOMOS committees in their specialties. In August 1993, Lenihan met with the members of the Underwater Archaeology Committee in Sri Lanka at the 10th General Assembly of ICOMOS, and Taylor presented a paper at an ICOMOS-sponsored symposium on earthen architecture in Portugal in October 1993. Taylor also organized the highly successful 6th International Conference on the Conservation of Earthen Architecture ("Adobe 90") in Las Cruces, NM. The National Park Service was one of its principal co-sponsors. Kate Dowdy and Kevin Brandt, SWRO employees, presented papers in Portugal and Venezuela respectively. (Dowdy's was on earthen architecture; Brandt's on "Sustainable Design in Protected Areas.") Barry Sulam, Chief of the Division of Conservation, has instituted a creative partnership with ICOMOS that allows architectural interns from other countries to work for the division. The SWR's conservation efforts in the last two years have been enriched by interns from Great Britain, Scotland, Lithuania, and Mexico. Howard Ness and Ramon Olivas of the Mexican Affairs Office have coordinated cooperative efforts to promote transboundary conservation efforts, especially in the training of Mexican conservation officials.

The region was especially proud of the opportunity to assist the Department of the Interior in hosting the 20th anniversary meeting of the World Heritage Committee, an event which brought approximately 150 foreign delegates to Santa Fe in December of 1992. We worked on the details of this meeting for six months. CRM readers can be assured that we welcomed the delegates to the United States in the finest traditions of the National Park Service.

As one of several regions which share a border with a foreign country, the Southwest Region is especially mindful that conservation and preservation efforts that stop at international borders are doomed to failure. To paraphrase the observations our Regional Director made in Saudi Arabia in 1991, we are eager to share what we know about resources preservation and we hope we are humble enough to recognize that we have much to learn from each other.

Heritage for use at all sites, training of seasonal interpreters, use of the World Heritage logo in signs and materials, and encouragement of Cooperating Associations to sell World Heritage related items.

There is evidence that site managers involved in these work sessions have already implemented some of these recommendations.

Prior to the World Heritage Committee meeting at Santa Fe, the United States, through the National Park Service, produced proposed revisions of the Committee's "Operational Guidelines" that would implement the letter and spirit of the Committee's "Strategic Orientations." At the June 1993 meeting of the Committee's Bureau in Paris, nearly all the proposed revisions of the Guidelines were approved for formal acceptance by the Committee at its next session.

Work is nearing completion on revisions to the criteria for evaluating natural heritage site nominations, and proposals have also been developed by NPS for a framework for the "Global Study" of cultural heritage sites, which would lead ultimately to similar revisions of the cultural criteria based on comparative assessments of the World Heritage List.

All these efforts have been undertaken to enable the Convention not only to realize its full potential as envisioned in 1972, but also to address new challenges based on anticipated trends of the future.

It should be noted that the process of evaluation and change is by no means marked by a clear beginning and ending. On the contrary, the process should be maintained and improved, on a continuous basis. However, the 1992 anniversary was an appropriate occasion to begin to advance the core elements that could be the bases for strategic plans by all the major players in the Convention, including the advisory bodies, UNESCO's World Heritage Centre, and the member countries.

There has been widespread support of the international community in these efforts to strengthen the World Heritage Convention. In all regions of the world there is growing evidence of the increasing number and intensity of threats to natural and cultural heritage sites. There is also an awareness that the future of many of these irreplaceable properties will be decided, for better or worse, within the next 10-20 years. It is all the more important, therefore, to assure that existing legal instruments—particularly those such as the World Heritage Convention—be allowed to reach their full potential in the service of monument and site protection worldwide.